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SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE AMBASSADOR REPORTS SISTANI SUPPORTIVE OF CONFERENCE PROPOSAL

REF: SECSTATE 1792

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Arab League Ambassador to Iraq Mukhtar Lamani told Poloff that his May 31 visit to Najaf was successful. During the one day trip, Lamani met separately with Ayatollah Sistani, Fadilah Party Spiritual Leader Muhammad al-Yaqubi, SCIRI leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim and Muqtada al-Sadr. Lamani was accompanied by Mouez al-Khateeb, the Iraqi MFA Director for Arab Affairs and Mevan Mohammed, Hakim's personal secretary. The Embassy provided helicopter transport for the party.

¶2. (S) Lamani said that Sistani was supportive of the June 20-22 reconciliation conference. Sistani told Lamani he would not attend, as he never participates in political meetings. Lamani said Sistani was also non-committal about whether his son Muhammad Ridha would attend. Lamani said that he spoke separately for 90 minutes with Muhammad Ridha and suggested that he have lunch with the son of the head of the Sunni Muslim Scholars Association Harith al-Dhari. Lamani said Muhammad Ridha told him he would consider the proposal. Lamani said that Muhammed al-Yaqubi was also very supportive of the conference and offered several constructive suggestions.

¶3. (S) Lamani said Muqtada al-Sadr raised two demands - that the conference not be held in the International Zone and that no Americans be present. Lamani assured Sadr on the first point and pointed out that during the sessions for Iraqis, there will be no non-Iraqis present. However, he told Sadr, during the sessions where foreign guests are present, the Americans will be there. Lamani indicated that Sadr was not satisfied by this response.

¶4. (C) Lamani said the most negative reaction to the conference came from Abdul Aziz al-Hakim who he claimed treated him to a 60 minute lecture on Ali and the Shia-Sunni split. Lamani said Hakim questioned the need for the conference and will likely create difficulties along the way.

KHALILZAD